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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ Safari Users Can Sue! ~ Computer On A Stick! ~ Make Your Own Game!

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-* FCC Defends Its Own Internet Decision *-
-* Greatfire: China Behind US Site Cyberattacks *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

A horizontal piano keyboard is shown, featuring a series of black and white keys arranged in a repeating pattern of five black keys followed by two white keys.

Well, we're just finishing up with a couple of Spring-like days here in New England - temps in the 50's and 60's! A lot of the remaining snow piles are quickly diminishing; I can actually see parts of my lawn now and a reminder of how much debris is out there to clean! The weather will turn around on us and we'll be faced with a week or so of cooler and soggy weather, but I guess we can live with that. At best, it's not more snow! The dogs will love slogging around in the mud, making life miserable for us trying to keep them "clean!" What can you do?

So, while we're here preparing for some rainy April weather, why don't you put the feet up, and enjoy this week's issue!

Until next time...

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 - Nintendo Direct Unveils Wooly 'Amiibo'
 - How To Make Your Own Video Game!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

'Halo 5' Launching in October

The next chapter in Master Chief's journey will continue on Oct. 27, when first-person shooter Halo 5: Guardians launches for Xbox One, Microsoft and developers 343 Industries confirmed.

Details on the release date were revealed during a pair of live-action trailers shown during the finale of The Walking Dead on AMC.

"We want to amaze players with the sheer size of the worlds and battles they'll experience, even as they question everything they thought they knew about its heroes, marvels and mysteries," says Bonnie Ross, head of 343 Industries, in a statement.

Unveiled last year, Halo 5 picks up after the events of predecessor Halo 4, with star Master Chief coping with the loss of his companion, Cortana. The game will sport a new technology engine built from the ground up.

Earlier this year, fans of the long-running Xbox franchise got a taste of Halo 5's multiplayer component through a beta testing session that ran through January.

In November, 343 launched Halo: The Master Chief Collection, a re-release of every Halo flagship title with a high-definition makeover. However, a myriad of bugs and other technical problems forced Ross to issue an apology for the rocky start. "We have not delivered the experience you deserve," read a statement from Ross on November 24, two weeks after the collection launched.

Nintendo Direct Unveils 200cc 'Mario Kart' And Wooly 'Amiibo'

Yesterday's Nintendo Direct unveils new wooly Amiibo, fresh characters for Super Smash Bros. a super tough 200c class for Mario Kart 8.

Here's a run down of the biggest headlines for families from the presentation:

Amiibo Cards: A totally new form of amiibo is coming this fall! The first set of amiibo cards will be based on Animal Crossing characters and will be compatible with the Animal Crossing: Happy Home Designer game.

New Amiibo: On May 29, a new set of Amiibo in the Super Smash Bros. series will launch, featuring Charizard, PAC-MAN, Wario, Jigglypuff, Greninja, Robin, Lucina and Ness. July brings Dark Pit and Palutena. And in September, Zero Suit Samus, Ganondorf, Olimar, Dr. Mario and Bowser Jr. will join the amiibo family.

Wooly Amiibo: A new set of Yoshi amiibo figures made of actual yarn will launch later this fall along with the Yoshi's Woolly World game. Tapping one of these yarn amiibo to the Wii U GamePad controller while playing Yoshi's Woolly World will make another Yoshi appear in the game to assist the player. The Yarn Yoshi amiibo will be available in three colours: green, pink and light blue.

Splatoon Amiibo: Launching simultaneously with Splatoon on May 29 are Inkling Girl, Inkling Boy and Inkling Squid amiibo figures. By tapping one of these amiibo to the GamePad, players can receive special missions to unlock weapons and gear. Also for Splatoon there are new single-player and online Turf War modes, along with competitive Ranked Battle 4-on-4 mode.

Mario Kart Amiibo: On April 23, a new free downloadable software update to Mario Kart 8 will add support for nine more amiibo figures, including Mega

Man, Sonic and PAC-MAN. Players can tap these amiibo to outfit their Mii characters in Mii Racing Suits themed to those amiibo characters. We will also be getting a super hard 200cc racing class for Mario Kart 8 via a free downloadable update on April 23 alongside the new paid DLC Pack 2.

Wii U Virtual Console: Straight away we can get classic Nintendo 64 and Nintendo DS on the Virtual Console on Wii U. Today brings Yoshi's Island DS for Nintendo DS and Super Mario 64 for Nintendo 64. While playing Nintendo DS games, the TV and GamePad combination will provide various options for dual-screen layouts, while all Nintendo 64 games that supported the Rumble Pack will continue rumbling away on Wii U controllers.

Animal Crossing: Happy Home Designer: This new game in the Animal Crossing series focuses on the decorating and home-designing aspects of the Animal Crossing games. Animals will ask players to design houses for them, and it's up to designers-in-the-making to meet the animals' requests by furnishing and decorating their homes.

By tapping a new Animal Crossing series amiibo card to the New Nintendo 3DS XL system or NFC reader/writer accessory, players can design a room for that specific character on the card and scan additional character cards to invite those characters to visit. **Animal Crossing: Happy Home Designer** will launch this fall.

Puzzle & Dragons Z 3DS: **Puzzle & Dragons Z + Puzzle & Dragons Super Mario Bros. Edition** launch on May 22.

Pokémon Rumble World 3DS: A new Pokémon Rumble title will be free to download (with paid content) and features more than 700 Pokémon, all the way from the original Pokémon Red and Pokémon Blue games to the recent Pokémon Omega Ruby and Pokémon Alpha Sapphire games. Coming to Nintendo eShop on Nintendo 3DS on April 8.

New StreetPass Games: On April 16, two new StreetPass Mii Plaza games launch. In Ultimate Angler, players visit the StreetPass Islands to try to catch more than 150 types of fish and legendary monsters with bait received from Mii characters via StreetPass. In Battleground Z, players receive items based on the hobbies of their Mii Plaza StreetPass characters to defeat a horde of zombies.

Also, a new paid service will also launch alongside these new games called StreetPass Mii Plaza Premium, adding features like StreetPass Birthdays and a new Mii character VIP Room.

How To Make Your Own Video Game

If you've played games long enough, you've surely thought, Hey, what if I made a game? Problem is, you don't have a fancy computer science degree. You don't know JavaScript from Fortran, and you wouldn't recognize an art pipeline if somebody hit you over the head with one.

Making games isn't easy. It wasn't easy 35 years ago when Warren Robinett was writing machine code to cram Atari 2600 Adventure into 4 kilobytes of memory, and it isn't any easier now that 300-person teams are spending millions to create incredibly complex 3D worlds with the latest in bleeding-edge graphics and animation techniques.

But if you can set your sights a bit lower than Halo 5, there are tons of resources out there to help you turn your playful dreams into a reality. These days, game-making software is practically a cottage industry. The first thing to do is find the right tool for the job. Start with these five.

1. GameMaker: Studio

First released in 1999, this is the granddaddy of modern game-making software, and its popularity is easy to understand. A no-frills interface will make anyone familiar with Photoshop feel right at home, and it combines tremendous depth with a huge community of users. The answers to many GameMaker questions are just a quick search away. Plus, the community forums are full of helpful veterans.

At its core, GameMaker is built for two-dimensional gaming. The toolset lends itself most naturally to classic genres such as platformers and scrolling shoot-em-ups. Go through one of the first tutorials and you'll quickly author a simple shooter that'll be familiar to anyone who's played the classic arcade game 1942.

Some may be turned off by GameMaker's old-school vibe, but I found it a powerful, surprisingly simple introduction to game design, partly because it forces you to confront fundamentals. What exactly is happening when one object bumps into another? If your character shoots a gun, what does that mean in terms of graphical sprites placed along X/Y coordinates? How many frames are in your heroine's animation, under what conditions does her image flip horizontally, how high does she jump, and how much control do you have over her while she's in midair? Answering these questions may seem tedious, but it can be exhilarating once you dig into them.

If you do want to write code—or better, yet copy and paste someone else's GameMaker accommodates that with its proprietary language, GML, which can be integrated with the mostly drag-and-drop interface.
Price: \$99 Sample Game: WizardWizard

2. Construct 2

Construct feels like GameMaker's younger, hipper, and pricier cousin. Released in 2011, it does a lot of the same things GameMaker does, but in different ways.

One of Construct's interface innovations is the Event Sheet, a separate tab that aggregates the game logic and instructions running in the background. While there's nothing here that can't be executed in GameMaker, the different presentation may be easier for some users to get their minds around.

Which program you prefer will largely come down to personal taste. I gravitated toward GameMaker for the simple reason that it was less picky about which sorts of audio files it was willing to import for sound effects and music, plus the full version is \$30 cheaper. But both feature plenty of depth, have a manageable learning curve, and will be especially congenial if your design ambitions skew retro.

Price: \$129 Sample Game: The Esfaralante

3. GameGuru

If you'd rather dive face-first into the third dimension and starting whipping up a crazy shooter, GameGuru might be right for you. Think of it as a stepping stone to more sophisticated 3D level editors like Unreal Engine 4 and CryEngine. It's limited, but you can start creating stuff fast.

Within about ten minutes of first booting up GameGuru and barely glancing at the documentation, I'd built a simple outdoor level containing trees, buildings, enemy soldiers, a zombie, and a medieval barbarian. And a trio of psychotic, laser-wielding rabbits. Horrifying! It's a rush to be able to dive so quickly into a world you've just painted.

The flipside to that, of course, is that a great deal of work has already been done for you in advance by the GameGuru folks. It's their version of a shooter interface, their version of an ammo/health counter, and their version of how an enemy soldier behaves. After all, you can't have it both ways: if you want to throw together a first-person shooter in a hurry, you need to rely on someone else to lay the groundwork for you. Much of GameGuru's content can be customized, but understandably, it takes significantly more technical expertise to do so.

GameGuru is such a new program that it doesn't have the wealth of add-ons, documentation, and veteran users that distinguishes, for example, GameMaker. Still in Early Access, it's got only a fraction of the features that, its makers claim, will eventually be available.

Price: \$20 Sample Game: There's not much out there yet in a finished state. But the GameGuru Developer Blog highlights promising works-in-progress from fans.

Download GameGuru (no free trial, sadly)

4. RPG Maker

Prefer old-school role-playing games? RPG Maker is your jam. Dating to 1988, this venerable series gives you a complete tool set to create maps, specify character classes and skills, script encounters, and tell for the umpteenth time the tale of a young hero from an obscure background who is called upon to save the world.

Like GameGuru, RPG Maker is initially a blast: You can create an environment, drop a character into it, and try it out in minutes flat. Dig into the tutorials, though, and you'll see there's a lot of depth here. It turns out making an RPG is about more than just painting happy little trees all over your hand-crafted mountain village. It's about databases. Databases! Character classes, skills, weapons, armor, magical items: Each one must be named, given characteristics, given an associated graphic, and cross-referenced based on who can use what and at which level. And we haven't even gotten to the monsters yet.

Even if its cutesy aesthetic isn't your cup of tea, RPG Maker will give you a powerful insight into the kind of background work it takes to make a good role-playing game. All without a line of code written.

Price: \$69.99 Sample Game: Aveyond: Lord of Twilight

5. Twine

Twine isn't conventional game-making software, strictly speaking. It's a program that lets you quickly and easily create web-based,

choose-your-own-adventure -style interactive fiction. A simple browser-based interface lets you click and drag different sections to create a complex flowchart. Each section is a standalone page, describing whatever you wish, with as many branching paths as you desire.

The dividing line between a game and interactive fiction is a fuzzy one, and open to debate. What's significant about Twine is that using it forces you to confront the very particular problems of branching-path storylines. How do you strike a balance between imposing your own will on a player's experience, and allowing them the freedom to make and own their choices? Can you come up with outcomes that are equally satisfying whether there are three different endings, or a hundred? Such questions are a part of designing all but the most linear games, and Twine provides a great sketchbook in which to work them out.

Alternatively, if you consider rich interactive fiction an end unto itself, there's no easier program on this list to use. And best of all, it's absolutely free.

Price: Free! Sample Twine: Swan Hill

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

FCC Defends Its Open Internet Decision

In a live-broadcast FCC meeting, the Wireline Competition Bureau and Media Bureau reiterated and defended the decisions made by the FCC in the February 26 meeting.

In the earlier meeting, the FCC passed a proposal by FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler that established laws for Internet conduct known as the Open Internet, reclassified the Internet as a telecommunications service, and removed barriers placed on municipal broadband networks in states such as Tennessee and North Carolina.

Since that time, the FCC has published the new rules and has undergone numerous legal conflicts. The United States Senate and House of Representatives have debated if the FCC has the legal right to make these changes.

Although the FCC Commissioners did not make an appearance, two members from the Wireline Competition Bureau's Competition Policy Division, and two from the Media Bureau's Policy Division, spoke in the live meeting.

Daniel Kahn, Deputy Chief for Wireline Competition Bureau, stated that there was strong evidence to support the development of municipal broadband networks. Under the new definition of broadband, 72 percent of users nationwide had access to two or fewer broadband providers, while 16 percent had no access to broadband services.

Kahn also stated that studies performed on the effects of broadband networks showed that ISPs in the private sector in competition with municipal broadband networks reduced service rates and increased spending on developing better networks.

Fellow Deputy Chief for the Wireline Competition Bureau, Claude Aiken, reiterated the main points of the Open Internet. Afterwards, Aiken and the remaining speakers, Diana Sokolow and Steven A. Broeckaert, reaffirmed the FCC's legal right and position to make these changes.

The FCC is responsible for ensuring the continued advancement of the Internet and promoting competition between providers of that service. The FCC has deemed that to advance the Internet, restrictions cannot be placed on services that use the Internet, or the ability of users to access the Internet for any legal purpose.

The information presented today is mostly a reiteration of the information presented in the earlier FCC documents on the Open Internet and the FCC's February 26 live meeting. The reason why the agency held today's meeting was to help inform and reaffirm to the public the FCC's stance on the Open Internet, despite the legal hassles it's facing.

If the U.S. legislative branch and the many companies in opposition to the Open Internet are successful, then the FCC's Open Internet decision will be overturned and revoked. However, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, in a meeting held March 27 at Ohio State University, stated that he believes that the FCC's decision will stand.

U.S. Coding Site Undergoes Denial-of-service Cyber Attack

U.S. coding site GitHub said on Sunday it was deflecting most of the traffic from a days-long cyber attack that had caused intermittent outages for the social coding site, with the Wall Street Journal citing China as the source of the attack.

"Eighty-seven hours in, our mitigation is deflecting most attack traffic," the GitHub Status account said in a tweet. "We're aware of intermittent issues and continue to adapt our response."

The attack took the form of a flood of traffic, known as a distributed denial of service, or DDoS, attack. Those are among the most common kinds of attacks on the Internet.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the flood of Internet traffic to GitHub came from Chinese search engine Baidu Inc, targeting two GitHub pages that linked to copies of sites banned in China.

On its blog, GitHub said the attack began early on Thursday "and involves a wide combination of attack vectors."

"These include every vector we've seen in previous attacks as well as some sophisticated new techniques that use the web browsers of unsuspecting, uninvolved people to flood github.com with high levels of traffic," the blog post continued.

"Based on reports we've received, we believe the intent of this attack

is to convince us to remove a specific class of content."

GitHub supplies social coding tools for developers and calls itself the world's largest code host.

A Beijing-based Baidu spokesman said a thorough investigation by the company had found it was neither a security problem on Baidu's side nor a hacking attack.

"We have notified other security organizations and are working to get to the bottom of this," the spokesman said.

The Chinese government has repeatedly denied it has anything to do with hacking attacks.

Asked about the report, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said China itself was one of the world's largest victims of hacking, and called for constructive international dialogue to tackle the issue.

Anti-censorship Group: China Behind Cyberattacks on US Sites

Chinese authorities have taken over computers both inside and outside the country to launch cyberattacks against the website of an anti-online censorship group and a U.S.-based web resource that hosts some of the group's data, according to an analysis released by the group.

Greatfire.org said in a statement Monday that Chinese authorities carried out denial-of-service attacks that have intermittently shut down San Francisco-based Github over the past week. Greatfire.org said it had mirrored some of its content on Github repositories, and that the data were the targets of the attacks.

Greatfire.org said Chinese authorities carried out the attacks by installing malicious code on the computers of users visiting the popular Chinese search engine Baidu and related sites and using those computers to overwhelm Github and Greatfire.org websites with service requests.

The group said the attacks marked the first of their kind blamed on Chinese authorities and represented a dangerous escalation for a country that already tightly restricts what Chinese can see online.

Greatfire.org said it was a direct target of similar denial-of-service attacks earlier in March.

Greatfire.org produces mirror websites that let Chinese users see information normally blocked by government censors. The group doesn't reveal where it's located or who runs it. The Open Technology Fund, a U.S. government-backed initiative to support Internet freedom, says on its website that it provided Greatfire.org with \$114,000 in 2014.

The Cyberspace Administration of China didn't respond to requests for comment Tuesday.

"Very clearly, the Cyberspace Administration of China is behind both of the recent (distributed denial-of-service) attacks," Greatfire.org said in its statement. "Hijacking the computers of millions of innocent internet users around the world is particularly striking as it illustrates the utter disregard the Chinese authorities have for international as well as even Chinese internet governance norms."

Google Yanks Trust for Chinese Digital Certificate Agency

It does not appear that Google's frosty relationship with China will thaw anytime soon, as the search giant this week said it will reject digital certificates from the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC).

At issue are the digital certificates issued on the Web, which ensure that sites are secure and not ridden with malicious software that might steal your information or ruin your device. In this case, Google discovered that CNNIC, which issues certificates for the .cn domain, made a deal with a company known as MCS Holdings, which used those certificates for a man-in-the-middle proxy.

As Google explained, the move would allow the firm to "intercept secure connections by masquerading as the intended destination and are sometimes used by companies to intercept their employees' secure traffic for monitoring or legal reasons."

"In this case, the presumed proxy was given the full authority of a public CA [certificate authority], which is a serious breach of the CA system," Google said last week, when the problem was first discovered.

Now, after further investigation, Google has decided to crack down on CNNIC. "We have decided that the CNNIC Root and EV CAs will no longer be recognized in Google products," the company said on Wednesday.

As Ars Technica noted, the move could affect those trying to connect to banking or shopping sites with certificates issued by CNNIC. To give companies time to respond, "for a limited time we will allow CNNIC's existing certificates to continue to be marked as trusted in Chrome, through the use of a publicly disclosed whitelist," Google said.

Still, those surfing to encrypted (HTTPS) websites ending in .cn via Google's Chrome might encounter a number of security warnings going forward, the Wall Street Journal said.

Not surprisingly, CNNIC is not happy.

"The decision that Google has made is unacceptable and unintelligible to CNNIC, and meanwhile CNNIC sincerely urge that Google would take users' rights and interests into full consideration," the organization said in a statement. "For the users that CNNIC has already issued the certificates to, we guarantee that your lawful rights and interests will not be affected."

Ars said Mozilla is still considering how to proceed. Microsoft has thus far banned the offending certificates from MCS Holdings.

Web firms were faced with a similar problem back in 2011 when Netherlands-based DigiNotar disclosed that it had been hacked. An investigation into the effect of the intrusion found that, among other things, the hack possibly compromised the Google accounts of more than 300,000 Iranians. Google, Microsoft, Mozilla, Adobe, and Apple subsequently blocked the DigiNotar digital certificates.

Two Federal Agents Charged with Stealing Bitcoins During Silk Road Investigation

Two former Federal investigators who helped to shut down the infamous black-market website 'Silk Road' accused of fraud and stealing more than a million dollars in Bitcoins during their investigation.

Silk Road, an infamous online drug market that hosted more than \$200 Million in transactions, was seized by the FBI in 2013, but during that period two of FBI agents took advantage of their position.

The US Department of Justice indictment charges 46-year-old former Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) special agent Carl Force, and 32-year-old former Secret Service agent Shaun Bridges, with the following charges:

Theft of government property
Wire fraud

Money laundering

Conflict of interest

Both Force and Bridges were part of Baltimore's Silk Road Task Force to investigate illegal activity in the black marketplace.

The creator of Silk Road, Ross Ulbricht, was arrested and found guilty of running the Tor-hidden black marketplace under the moniker "Dread Pirate Roberts" (DPR).

Force was the lead undercover agent who is accused of illegally selling the information about the government's investigation on Silk Road to Ross Ulbricht. Force used multiple online aliases to extort hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of Bitcoin from Ulbricht, according to the DoJ complaint.

The laptop found during the arrest of Ulbricht also contained evidence against Force and Bridges, including their chats with DPR. Mr. Force accused of stealing at least \$235,000, while Bridges allegedly stole \$820,000 in Bitcoins.

The DoJ complaint also says that Force created a persona called "French Maid" on the underground black marketplace and took \$100,000 from Dread Pirate Roberts for information on the government's investigation of Silk Road. Force then deposited the money in his personal investment account in the US.

It s yet unclear if 'French Maid' actually gave any details to Ulbricht, but it is claimed Force received \$100,000 payment in BTC from Ulbricht.

Ulbricht laptop also contained a "log" file dated September 13, 2013, in which he had written, "French Maid claims that mark karpeles has given my name to DHLS [sic]. I offered him \$100K for the name."

Moreover, Force also created another fake online persona, "Death from Above," to try and extort \$250,000 from Dread Pirate Roberts but was unsuccessful.

According to prosecutors, Death from Above claimed to know who Dread Pirate Roberts really was and also threatened to kill the drug souk boss until or unless the money was paid.

The alleged agent didn't stop here. Force is also accused to misuse his DEA's legal powers to freeze a Bitcoin account on a service called CoinMKT and transferred around \$300,000 into his own account.

Bridges allegedly direct all the amount into an account at the digital currency exchange Mt. Gox, and then wired funds into his personal accounts.

Force also used an unauthorized DOJ subpoena to convince an online payment service so the company would unfreeze his personal account.

Federal officials arrested Force on Friday, while Bridges surrendered himself to the authorities on Monday. Both appeared before a judge earlier Monday. Force resigned from the DEA in May, while Bridges resigned from the Secret Service earlier this month.

Microsoft Stops Turning On Do-Not-Track Commands

Changing course, Microsoft said today that it will no longer activate do-not-track signals by default in its browser.

As industry standards evolve, how we implement those standards evolve as well, Microsoft's chief privacy officer Brendon Lynch says today in a blog post announcing the move.

The decision marks a significant shift from 2012, when Microsoft stunned online ad companies by announcing it would turn on the signals automatically. That move initially struck some observers as pro-privacy. But it ended up backfiring, because the decision made it easy for ad companies to justify ignoring the settings on the grounds that they didn't reflect users' choices.

Do-not-track headers tell publishers and ad networks that users don't want their Web activity recorded and used for marketing purposes. The industry already allows people to decline behaviorally targeted ads, but the industry run opt-out mechanism involves setting opt-out cookies. The problem for users is that those opt-outs disappear when people shed their cookies.

By contrast, browser-based commands persist regardless of whether people clear their cookies.

But browser-based do-not-track commands don't actually prevent tracking. On the contrary, ad networks and publishers are free to ignore the signals - and many do so.

One reason why few companies now honor the signals is that the industry hasn't yet finalized efforts to implement them. The Internet standards group World Wide Web Consortium has tried for many years to figure out how publishers and ad networks should respond to do-not-track signals, but those efforts are still ongoing.

Today's move by Microsoft is probably helpful to the W3C's initiative to standardize do-not-track, says Justin Brookman, who chairs the W3C's Tracking Protection Group. If DNT is a clear affirmative choice in all browsers, it's harder for companies to credibly ignore the signals, he

says in an email to MediaPost.

Microsoft itself seems to realize that its former approach likely hindered efforts to implement an industry-wide program.

Put simply, we are updating our approach to DNT to eliminate any misunderstanding about whether our chosen implementation will comply with the W3C standard, Lynch writes today. The W3C's current draft says that the signals must reflect users' preferences, as opposed to choices made by vendors. Without this change, websites that receive a DNT signal from the new browsers could argue that it doesn't reflect the user's preference, and therefore, choose not to honor it, he writes.

Google Amps Up Assault on Adware

Google yesterday said that 1 in 20 personal computers is infected with what it called an "ad injector" as it previewed a few factoids from research it will publish in just over a month.

"More than 5% of people visiting Google sites have at least one ad injector installed," said Nav Jagpal, a software engineer with Google's Safe Browsing team, in a blog post Tuesday. "Within that group, half have at least two injectors installed and nearly one-third have at least four installed."

"Ad injectors" are just what they sound like: Small programs that insert online advertisements into a Web page, typically without authorization from either the device owner or the publisher of the website. Superfish Visual Discovery, the ad injector that blew up in Lenovo's face last month, was a very prominent example.

Google considers ad injectors parasitic, and has taken a long string of steps over the year to suppress them - most recently in February when it added an alert to its Chrome browser that pops up when users try to access a website that the search firm suspects will try to dupe users into downloading underhanded software.

Jagpal highlighted a few other data points that he said came from a study Google conducted with researchers at the University of California, Berkeley. The complete study is to be published May 1.

Ad injectors, more commonly known as "adware," were detected on both Windows and OS X systems, and within Chrome, Mozilla's Firefox and Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE), Jagpal said. "Researchers found 192 deceptive Chrome extensions that affected 14 million users," he added, noting that those browser add-ons have been disabled.

Jagpal also contended that ad injectors have been the most common complaint from Chrome users this year, with more than 100,000 logged so far.

Google's message about ad injectors is that they are, well, bad. But not only for users. "Unwanted ad injectors aren't part of a healthy ads ecosystem," said Jagpal. "They're part of an environment where bad practices hurt users, advertisers, and publishers alike."

That was a different tack than before, when Google stressed only how unwanted software in general, adware specifically, affected users.

Jagpal's description of injectors' impact on the ad ecosystem - of which Google is by far the largest single entity - was the company's longest, most detailed by far.

That's no coincidence.

The company has focused on ad injectors for obvious, if until-lately-unstated, reasons. The last thing Google wants is to have adware, especially the most irritating, turn off everyone to all online advertising, or piggyback unauthorized ads on those it places on search results pages.

Ben Bajarin, an analyst at Creative Strategies, one of several experts who believe that Google faces some serious long-range problems, put that into a broader context yesterday. "The ad-supported model is wreaking havoc on the user experience of the Web," Bajarin said Tuesday in a piece posted to Tech.pinions (subscription or 50-cent payment required).

"While Google may not [be] the abuser, they are not in complete control," Bajarin said of the user experience. "Publishers layer ad unit after ad unit, interstitials at the beginning, middle, and end of an article, and cover sites with ads to the point they are painfully unusable."

Google's efforts to suppress ad injectors could be viewed as an attempt to regain some control over the user experience.

Jagpal said as much yesterday, albeit couching it in more altruistic terms without directly acknowledging the benefit to Google's ad-based business model. "We're committed to continuing to improve this experience for Google and the Web as a whole," Jagpal said.

Safari Users Win Right To Sue Google Over Secret Cookies

In a landmark case that could determine if Google can be held accountable in the UK, Google has lost an appeal to stop the country's consumers from being able to sue over alleged misuse of privacy settings in Apple's Safari browser.

Three judges dismissed Google's Court of Appeal bid over a high court decision that also went against Google.

The judges ruled that damages can be brought over Google's alleged misuse of private information.

Safari users are lining up.

A group known as Safari Users Against Google's Secret Tracking wants to take legal action in UK courts over what it says is Google's tracking of Safari users, accusing the company of bypassing the browser's privacy settings to track users online and to send targeted adverts their way.

By slipping past Safari's default privacy setting to place cookies in this manner, Google was able to gather data including surfing habits, social class, race, and ethnicity, all without users' knowledge.

In 2012, the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) smacked Google with a

\$22.5 million fine (about £15 million) over this issue.

According to the BBC, Google has also been sued separately by 38 US states and has already paid, cumulatively, fines of over \$40 million (about £26.8 million).

As the FTC explained at the time, Google snuck around Safari's privacy setting control that disallowed ad cookies by creating an invisible HTML form and then using JavaScript to pretend a user had submitted it.

Google thereby bypassed the browser's blocking of third-party cookies - i.e., those set by sites other than the ones a user originally visits.

The form was invisible and lacked either content or a Submit button, meaning the user could never have actually submitted it.

But Safari, duped into thinking the user had submitted a form, then allowed Google to place a DoubleClick cookie on the user's computer.

Google had tried to avoid further lawsuits by arguing that Safari users hadn't suffered financial damage.

But in its judgment, the Court of Appeal said that the claims "raise serious issues" that merit a trial.

They concern what is alleged to have been the secret and blanket tracking and collation of information, often of an extremely private nature... about and associated with the claimants' internet use, and the subsequent use of that information for about nine months. The case relates to the anxiety and distress this intrusion upon autonomy has caused.

Dan Tench, a partner at law firm Olswang, which represents the group of Safari users set to seek damages, told The Guardian that the landmark case would decide "whether British consumers actually have any right to hold Google to account in this country".

This is the appropriate forum for this case here in England where the consumers used the internet and where they have a right to privacy.

Want To Secure Your Social Info? Facebook Shows You How

Facebook today launched 11 interactive guides and how-tos to help users secure their social information.

The new guides, which can be found on the Facebook Privacy Basics site, are designed to help users understand the best ways to create a strong password, how to handle suspicious messages and what to do if someone takes over the user's account.

Available in 40 languages, the guides also touch on how the world's largest social network responds to government requests for user information and the steps Facebook takes to protect your information.

"Since last November, millions of people have visited Facebook Privacy Basics, a dedicated resource that gives people a simpler way to find and use our privacy controls," wrote Melissa Luu-Van, a Facebook product manager, in a blog post. "After seeing how interested people are in

material like this, we discovered that they also had questions about our security tools."

Zeus Kerravala, an analyst with ZK Research, told Computerworld that this is a helpful step for Facebook's more than 1 billion users. "I really like this," he said. "I think security of Internet sites can be intimidating, especially for non-tech-savvy people. I believe the majority of users just choose the default settings and then are surprised when that level of security isn't enough. Facebook's easy-to-follow guide should allow more people to be as secure or insecure as they want to be but understand it better."

Kerravala also said the graphics added to the guides make the instructions easier to follow.

"The information is there but it's more the graphical guide that makes it easy," he explained. "The graphics de-intimidate the process I think this is the type of information that all users should know. There are so many scams and the like on the web, it's important to not have Facebook be the conduit for it."

The issue is getting users to check out the new guides so they can better protect themselves while on Facebook.

Patrick Moorhead, an analyst with Moor Insights & Strategy, said Facebook will need to help users find the information, possibly by putting pointers near where people sign in and out or on their news feeds.

"Even better would be for them to take some of their precious ad space and advertise the new capability," said Moorhead. "I think this is a really good step for users. But I think Facebook should be this aggressive in protecting their users' privacy. Users need both security and privacy protection."

Leave Facebook If You Value Your Privacy, Says EU

Citizens within the European Union (EU) have been advised to close their Facebook accounts if they wish to keep their private information away from the prying eyes of the US security services.

In a hearing that could have significant bearing on the future of the EU-US Safe Harbor agreement, European Commission attorney Bernhard Schima as good as admitted that the current agreement was not fit for purpose, telling attorney-general Yves Bot:

You might consider closing your Facebook account, if you have one.

Schima's remark came during a case brought by Austrian law student Max Schrems following complaints filed against Facebook and four other US companies - Apple, Microsoft, Skype, and Yahoo - with the relevant data protection authorities in Ireland, Luxembourg and Germany.

After Irish Data Protection Commissioner Billy Hawkes refused to investigate Schrems' claims surrounding the mass transfer of Facebook users' data to the US's National Security Agency (NSA), citing Safe Harbor rules, the case was elevated firstly to the Irish High Court and now to the European Court of Justice (ECJ).

Schrems, and his crowd-funded 'Europe v Facebook' group, began campaigning after Edward Snowden revealed how the Prism data-gathering program gave US intelligence services access to data held by nine US firms, including the five named above.

That, the case argues, breaches the EU's Data Protection Directive, which outlaws the transfer of citizens' personal data to countries outside of the EU unless they meet an "adequacy" standard for privacy protection.

On that point Schrems, who was live tweeting the proceedings from Luxembourg, seized on the fact that the European Commission said:

The Commission cannot confirm an adequate protection right now.

The International Association of Privacy Professionals reports, however, that the Commission maintained that Safe Harbor remains a necessity, arguing that:

Safe Harbor is a politically and economically necessary framework that is still under negotiation and is best left in the hands of the commission to work toward a better protection of EU citizen rights.

The negotiations over Safe Harbor - which allows US tech firms such as Facebook and Google to deliver targeted adverts to EU citizens - have been underway since November 2013 with no end to the discussions in sight.

In the meantime, the ECJ was asked to consider whether individual national data protection authorities (DPAs) have the authority to block data transfers where deemed necessary. The Commission's stance is that it is simply not possible because the DPAs "are in principle not empowered" to suspend data transfers to the United States.

Schrems, however, found backing not only from advocacy group Digital Rights Ireland, which argued that the existing Safe Harbor agreement couldn't protect citizens' data, but also from national representatives from countries including Austria and Poland. Representatives from Ireland said they would welcome further guidance on the matter.

If the outcome of the case is the nullification of the Safe Harbor agreement, US companies would still be able to apply to transfer data out of the EU but, Schrems explains via Europe-v-Facebook, doing so may prove more challenging than at present:

A number of companies (e.g. Twitter in its recent Annual Report) expect that it may become harder for US companies to retrieve data from the European Union and it may be necessary to invest in secure European data centers.

The Advocate General of the ECJ will give his opinion on the Safe Harbor framework on 24 June 2015.

You Can Now Run Android Apps on a Mac or PC

Google's convergence of Chrome and Android is taking a big step forward this week. After launching a limited App Runtime for Chrome (ARC) back in September, Google is expanding its beta project to allow Android apps to

run on Windows, OS X, and Linux. It's an early experiment designed primarily for developers, but anyone can now download an APK of an existing Android app and launch it on a Windows / Linux PC, Mac, or Chromebook.

You simply need to download the ARC Welder app and obtain APKs from Google's Play Store. There are some limitations: only one app can be loaded at a time, and you have to select landscape or portrait layout and whether you want the app to run in phone- or tablet-style. However, you can load multiple apps by selecting the download ZIP option in Arc Welder and extracting it and then enabling extension developer mode to load the folder of the extracted APK. During my testing I've found that most apps run really well. There are some exceptions like Gmail and Chrome for Android that throw up Google Play Services errors, but that's not because ARC doesn't support them. Developers will need to optimize their apps for ARC, and some Google Play Services are also supported right now, making that process a lot easier.

ARC is based on Android 4.4, meaning a lot of standalone apps are immediately compatible. Twitter works well, and Facebook Messenger loads just fine but does continuously say it's waiting for the network. I was impressed with Flipboard, and the ability to flick through using two finger gestures on a trackpad, and even Instagram works well for casual browsing. Of course, trying to use the camera in apps will immediately force the app to crash, and keyboard commands aren't always recognized properly. The biggest issue is that most apps are simply designed for touch, or in the case of games to use a phone's accelerometer.

I tried a variety of games, and while simple titles like Candy Crush Soda work very well, others refused to launch properly or couldn't handle mouse input correctly. That's not surprising for apps that aren't even optimized, and it's clear Google's project has a bright future. While Microsoft is building out Windows 10 and the idea of universal apps across PCs, phones, tablets, and the Xbox One, Google is turning Android into its own universal app platform.

Google already built a way to push Chrome OS straight into Windows 8, and this latest Android experiment brings Google even closer to a PC market dominated by Microsoft. Developers can now run their Android apps on phones, tablets, PCs, Macs, Chromebooks, and even Linux-powered devices, and that's a big opportunity that will likely result in a lot of these apps arriving in the Chrome Web Store in the near future.

Update April 3rd: article amended to note you can add multiple apps.

Google Unveils 'Stick' Computer With Asus

Google and Taiwan's Asus are launching a "computer on a stick" which can plug into a display to turn it into a PC.

Google said in a blog post that the Asus Chromebit would be arriving mid-year with a low price tag.

"Smaller than a candy bar, the Chromebit is a full computer that will be available for less than \$100," Google said.

"By simply plugging this device into any display, you can turn it into a

computer. It's the perfect upgrade for an existing desktop and will be really useful for schools and businesses."

The statement offered no other details on the device, but Google also announced its lowest-cost Chromebook laptop computers at \$149 in partnership with Chinese electronic groups Haier and Hisense.

With a display of 11.6 inches, the Haier computer is being sold through Amazon and the Hisense PC through Walmart.

Google has produced Chrome devices with other manufacturers including Acer, Lenovo, Dell and LG.

Google \$100 Chromebit Turns Any TV Into a Computer

Imagine reaching into your pocket and pulling out a computer! Google has made it possible to put your whole computer into your pocket by introducing a whole new kind of Chrome device a tiny stick that plugs into HDMI port of any display.

Dubbed Chromebit, a fully featured computer-on-a-stick from Asus that Google promises to retail for less than \$100 when it comes out this summer. You just need to plug a Chromebit right into your TV or any monitor in order to turn it into a full-fledged Chrome OS-based computer.

Google Chromebit is portable with an impressive look and will be available in three attractive colors silver, blue and orange. It has a smarter clinch on the business end so that a user can easily plug it into practically any HDMI port without the need of any extension cable.

This tiny little Google Chromebit stick packaged with:

- Rockchip RK3288 (with quad-core Mali 760 graphics)
- 2GB of RAM
- 16GB of solid state storage memory
- a single full-size USB 2.0 port
- Bluetooth 4.0
- Smart Ready controller
- WiFi 802.11 ac support
- ARM Mali 760 quad-core GPU

Although Google Chromebit will not be the most powerful computer you could plug into your TV, it should not be too bad for the browser-based operating systems. Google believes that Chromebit will be of great use in schools and small businesses due to its price and easy manageability.

In addition to Chromebit, Google also announced several cheap Chrome devices, including Haier Chromebook 11 (available online at Amazon) and Hisense Chromebook (available at Walmart). Both are 11.6-inch Chromebooks will be available at \$149, making them cheaper and affordable than most smartphones.

The basic specifications for the Haier and Hisense Chromebooks are essentially the same with 2GB of RAM, feature two USB ports, 16GB solid flash storage, SD Card reader and HDMI output, as well as 720p webcam and WiFi and Bluetooth antennas.

The technology giant also announced that ASUS plans to launch a new "Chromebook Flip" convertible with the same internals later this spring for \$249. Chromebook Flip will come with a 10.1-inch touchscreen display that flips all the way around so the device can be used in tablet mode.

Microsoft Ended Support for Windows XP Almost A Year Ago And It Still Has More Users Than Windows 8

How much has Windows 8 bombed with PC users? So much that an obsolete operating system that had its technical support cut off nearly a full year ago still has more global users.

Recall that it was on April 8th last year that Microsoft ended support for Windows XP, which meant that users stopped getting any more automatic updates and were no longer able to download Microsoft Security Essentials for their PCs anymore. Microsoft made a big push to get people to move away from XP for security reasons and upgrade to newer software, particularly to Windows 8 or 8.1.

Despite this push, however, the biggest gainer over the past year has been Windows 7 and it's not even close.

According to NetMarketShare, at this time last year Windows 8 and 8.1 had a combined market share of 11.3%, Windows 7 had a market share of 48.8% and Windows XP had a market share of 27.5%. One year later, NetMarketShare's numbers inform us that Windows 8 and 8.1 now have a combined market share of 14%, Windows 7 has a market share of 58% and XP has a market share of 16.9%.

So to recap: Over the past year, Windows 8.x's market share has gained 2.7 percentage points while Windows 7's has gained 9.2 percentage points. Not only that but an operating system that hasn't received technical support for nearly a year still has a higher market share than Windows 8.x.

We've said this before, but Windows 10 really can't come out soon enough.

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